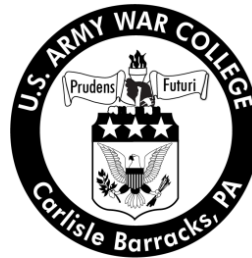


Strategy Research Project

Leadership Theory Taught in Air Force Distant Learning Programs

by

Colonel Robert Scott Weichert
United States Air Force Reserve



United States Army War College
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Abstract

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Leadership Theory Taught in Air Force Distant Learning Programs

Effective and credible leadership is the essence of our military officers. More than just a competency, the idea of exceptional leadership is the singular foundational basis attributed to great officers. While some of the characteristics of leadership are inherent, others must be groomed through diversity of exposure, mentorship, and formal training.¹

The Air Force has structured leadership training built into each phase of officer development. Squadron Officer School (SOS), Air Command and Staff College (ACSC), and Air War College (AWC) each have specified leadership training constructed in the respective curriculum. This leadership training is tailored to Captains, Majors, and Lieutenant Colonels respectively. For many reserve officers, the distance learning programs offered in each phase of officer development are the only formal leadership training that is both available and appropriate to a large percentage of the force. Due to this reality, it is imperative that leadership training curriculums are appropriate for each phase of officer development.

Through an analysis of leadership, leadership theory, and explanations of each, I will analyze the leadership curriculum for each school as a basis of examination for effectiveness and appropriateness. Recommendations will be offered for areas of improvement.

Leadership

The concept of leadership has been studied throughout the ages to find the ingredients that make up our finest leaders, both past and present. However, it seems the more study that is conducted, the more elusive the concept of effective leadership becomes.² Is it the leader, the circumstance, the follower, or some combination of factors that produce outstanding leaders? Some definitions and a discussion of

leadership and management are in order to frame this discussion. Comparisons will be offered to clarify the specific areas.

Definition of Leadership

There exist as many different definitions of leadership as there are people to define the term.³ The Encarta Dictionary describes leadership as the ability to guide, direct, or influence people. This definition is rudimentary, but encompasses many of the key ingredients of leadership. Leaders guide a group or organization, they direct and focus effort, and they influence processes and people. Much of leadership is synonymous with these concepts, but more complete definitions can further clarify these ideas. To conceptualize the idea of leadership, we must look at the idea from different vantages. Some describe leadership as a group process; while others describe a personality perspective, a combination of traits, an act or behavior, a power relationship, a transformational process, or a skills related endeavor.⁴ Regardless of the approach, there are some components of leadership that hold true regardless of perspective. Disagreement exists because leadership is a complex phenomenon involving the leader, the follower, and the situation.⁵

It is important to understand that there is no single definition of leadership that is generally accepted as complete. While some variations appear more inclusive than others, a commonly accepted definition of leadership comes from Bass who states: "Leadership has been conceived as the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviors, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions."⁶ This all-encompassing

categorization is a catch-all for most of the predominant leadership theories. Due to the definition's broad nature and lack of specificity, its usefulness when taken as a whole is limited. For increased function, this definition can be further refined into key individual parts.

Based upon an assessment of leadership from a functional perspective, it is obvious that leadership occurs predominately in the group environment. While a leader can influence a single individual, it is more common to focus on leadership within the realm of a group of individuals. It is the interaction between the leader and the followers that sets the standard for many of the most common thoughts on leadership. The leader affects the group and the group affects the leader. Although influence can occur in both directions, it is most common to associate our classic definitions with the leader influencing a group of individuals towards a common goal.⁷

Leadership is also a function of personality. According to Kirkpatrick and Locke, six essential leadership traits are drive, desire to lead, honesty/integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge of the business.⁸ While there is no definitive list, the six mentioned above encompass a solid basis. These traits reflect the personality of the leader. Most successful leaders are driven, confident, and intelligent. These aspects of personality provide a foundation for leadership potential. Based on numerous studies in the field of leadership, Stogdill concluded that the average person who occupies a position of leadership exceeds the average member of the group in intelligence, scholarship, dependability, social participation, and socio-economic status.⁹

Leadership is also about persuasion, influence, and power. In many cases, these are the identifiable aspects. Persuasion and influence come from a specific source of

power. French and Raven describe the bases of power as reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and referent.¹⁰ If power has the potential to influence, these have to be considered critical components. Reward power comes from compliance based on the control of a precious commodity such as pay, promotion, and benefits. Coercive power focuses exclusively on punishment or the avoidance thereof. Legitimate power comes from formal authority and is based on a specific position within the organization. This can be defined on the organizational chart with a title such as Wing Commander. Expert power is based on specific skills that are irreplaceable within the organization such as instructor pilot. Lastly, referent power generally comes from leader admiration and is closely related to charismatic leadership. Referent power can also exist by a close or friendly relationship with a powerful member of the organization. These bases of power are important to leaders because they are components that influence behavior in others. As power and leadership are both about influence, there exists a strong correlation between the two concepts.

As there are many similarities between definitions of leadership, Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy summarize some of the more famous theories as a point of comparison. Leadership is defined as: a creative and directive force of morale, a process that induces subordinates to act in a certain manner, a presence of influence between two or more people, directing and coordinating the work of group members, an interpersonal relationship where others comply because they want to, a process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing its goals, and actions that focus resources to create a desirable state.¹¹

These different definitions speak to individual aspects, as well as group endeavors. Some speak to a higher power or greater good, while others focus strictly on influence and power. Goals are mentioned as an ends to a means, but other definitions fail to mention the existence of common goals anywhere in the discussion. The prime aspects of leadership are in the eyes of the person defining the topic. If influence is important to the member, the definition will revolve around that aspect. Others feel group dynamics are the most important leadership ingredient. Some concentrate on leader personality and traits, while other look at behavior. Regardless, most scholars consider leadership a definable skill different from other endeavors in the organization such as management tasks.

Elements of Leadership and Management

The term leader and manager are used interchangeably in many circumstances. Clarifying the differences between the two ideas is important to distinguish the key elements of each. Management is a term generally used to define a specific position within an organization. Although managers are leaders in many cases, there remain distinct differences between the two. According to Lawler, management is a search for certainty and leadership is a means of dealing with chaos.¹² The two entities have the potential to be diametrically opposed, as management is about stability, whereas leadership is about change.¹³

Today's volatile environment is ripe for leadership requirements and opportunity. Dealing with increasing complexity, fierce international competition, deregulated markets, overcapacity in capital, unstable oil prices, changing demographics, and faster technological change have made talented leadership an incredibly important facet of all organizations.¹⁴ Credible management is not enough to see our military structure

through turbulent times. Leaders with maturity, vision, and steady demeanor are required to navigate the uncharted waters. To enable success, three elements of leadership are identified and discussed below.

Leaders must establish direction.¹⁵ This direction is articulated in the form of an organizational vision generally referred to as a mission statement. This vision must be shared and socialized throughout the organizational structure. Communication is critical to establish and energize a shared vision and strategy. The strategy must be in line with the organizational vision and have an enduring presence. Leaders must be able to see the big picture, but understand the intricacies of subcomponents as well.

Leaders must align people.¹⁶ It is of no use to establish vision and strategy if the members of the organization are not supportive. The organizational goals must be clearly communicated and socialized. When communicating new policy, expectation management is key to member resolve. Although leaders are in the business of change, the new direction is not completely fulfilled until the last member of the organization is committed to the cause. As change is created, it may be necessary to create new teams within the organization to handle and socialize the change. Motivation is a key element to the equation.

Leaders inspire and motivate.¹⁷ As change is the only constant, leaders must inspire the new behavior that is now required for the task. People must be energized and enthusiastic as the change is embraced. Members must be empowered to handle small course corrections within their individual area of expertise. Additionally, members of the organization must have the required buy in to see the change to a logical

conclusion. Unfortunately for the managers within the organization, this logical conclusion usually results in more change.

Leadership and Management Comparison

Research has identified three critical areas for management and leadership comparison. Using the three elements of leadership identified above, a comparative analysis will be conducted to clarify differences in individual areas.

Planning and budgeting are vastly different from establishing direction. Planning and budgeting are management instruments that are about setting targets, creating policy and tools to achieve those targets, and committing resources to accomplish the plan.¹⁸ Conversely, establishing direction is a leadership function and is about developing vision and strategy for the long-term success of the organization. The two concepts have similarities, but one is strictly about what is going on now, and the other is about what is going to happen in the future. "Planning works best not as a substitute for direction setting, but as a complement to it."¹⁹ Although opposing forces at times, the two concepts can act harmoniously when properly executed.

Next is aligning versus staffing. Management plays a critical role in developing and executing a plan to organize and staff an organization. These are important roles as organizations require the right people to do the right job. Managers find qualified individuals, communicate the organizational plan, delegate the responsibility to execute the plan, and devise systems to monitor the progress.²⁰ These are all important functions within an organization, but the leadership equivalent to staffing is aligning. Leaders align members of the organization by creating and communicating vision and direction, forming coalitions that understand the vision, and supporting those who are

committed to the achievement of the vision.²¹ Leaders drive the change and managers monitor and staff its progress.

Lastly, management controls and leadership motivates.²² Managers are there to ensure the goals are accomplished by instituting plans to control behavior. Results are measured through the use of reports, meetings, and other planning and organizing mechanisms. These plans must be as close as possible to fail-safe and risk-free.²³ Conversely, leaders achieve goals by motivating and inspiring members of the organization by communicating vision, coaching, and rewarding success. While managers strive for a compliant risk-free environment, leaders encourage free thinking and individual/team initiative as a means to accomplish organizational goals.

Leadership Theory

Training in leadership is foundationally based on leadership theory. In addition to providing a foundation, leadership theory informs the practice of leadership.²⁴ As leadership is both art and science, leadership theory is the science-based aspect of the leadership equation. It is through the lens of leadership theory that I will analyze the Air Force leadership curriculum for the respective officer courses. To enable this analysis, a discussion of trait and situational leadership theories were selected because they represent two of the most prominent leadership theories. Additionally, they are polar opposites. Trait theory lends itself to innate characteristics, while situational leadership is a more process oriented approach to leadership.²⁵ Research has shown reference to these theories in the Air Force leadership curriculum.

Trait Theory

The trait theory of leadership, one of the most recognized and researched leadership theory variants, accounts for leader characteristics as a predictor of

leadership success. This theory is one of the older theories of leadership and was most prevalent in the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁶ Considered similar to the great man theory of leadership, trait theory focuses on specific leader characteristics and qualities.²⁷ While related to personality characteristics, the trait theory has been used to identify specific qualities of great political, military, social, and business leaders.

Throughout the years, the military has taught leadership in a fashion that resembles the ideals of the trait theory. Studies of Brigadier General Billy Mitchell, General Jimmy Doolittle, and Brigadier General Robin Olds have highlighted specific characteristics and traits that make up these leaders. The idea behind the lesson is to emulate the positive aspects as a path to grow as a leader. Military leadership education emphasizes the characteristics of the leaders from the past as a method to teach the leaders of the future. Discussion with regard to the validity of this approach is infinitely debatable, but the trait theory is alive and well in today's military.

The essence of the trait theory lies in the specific characteristics and qualities that provide the foundation for leadership; call it the personality traits of leadership. Stogdill, Mann, and Kirkpatrick and Locke are commonly quoted theorists in this field of study. Although done independently, their collective work adds up to an impressive list of leader characteristics based on years of study. When the data is correlated, a summary list begins to develop. Northhouse summarizes the major leadership traits as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability.²⁸ Kirkpatrick and Locke have a similar summary list including drive, leader motivation, honesty/integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, knowledge of the business, charisma, creativity, and flexibility.²⁹ It is evident there are many similarities between the lists, with many aspects

simply relabeled. When combinations and similar characteristics are united, a few key elements of leadership qualities are evident.

Intelligence and Cognitive Ability

While genius is not required to be an effective leader, most studies indicate that leaders are more intelligent than the average member in the organization. The Air Force measures intelligence through the Air Force Officer Qualifying Test (AFOQT). This test is used as a selection criterion for future officer candidates. It seems obvious this requirement would be a precursor to effective leadership. Kirkpatrick and Locke indicate that leadership effectiveness requires above average intelligence.³⁰ Today's leaders have to process and analyze vast amounts of information on a daily basis. This information must be categorized and prioritized with relative ease. From there, the leader is able to make efficient and timely decisions with regard to the constantly changing environment. Without a strong sense of reality, credible decisions are not possible. Intelligence is a key factor in compiling large amounts of data to produce a credible, fact-based sense of reality.

Self-Confidence

This leadership characteristic is key to producing vision. If the leader is unsure of the decisions, or has a high degree of doubt, subordinates will be unwilling to follow based on the presence of uncertainty. This uncertainty will lead to lack of trust and commitment from the follower.³¹ Although the vision provided from the leader might be the best course of action, without followership the leader is destined to fail. As an example of instruction in this area, the Air Force incorporates confidence boosting activities in Squadron Officer School field exercises. These activities incorporate a problem solving situation that requires teamwork, confidence, and ingenuity.

Additionally, self-confidence is an important part of resiliency. It is common for great leaders to have failures along the way. Without self-confidence, there is no recovery mechanism to deal with failure. A strong leader must recover, learn from the mistake, and keep pressing towards the vision of the organization.

Determination/Motivation

With the self-confidence to press ahead, the successful leader must remain determined to complete the tasks required for a successful outcome. Within the framework of determination, key aspects include initiative, persistence, dominance, and drive.³² Types of characteristics such as initiative and drive are about proacting, not reacting. Leaders must possess a take-charge attitude where they engage in the problems and find creative solutions. This process requires persistence, patience, and proper motivation to complete the task. The Air Force rewards determined and motivated officers with increased rank and responsibility. As a unit of measure, officer retention rates are a key indicator of motivation. If mid level officers are consistently leaving the force, fundamental gaps in motivation could be an underlying cause.

Sociability/Charisma

Sociability is the characteristic of a leader to be gregarious. Leaders who are sociable are considered friendly, outgoing, courteous, tactful, and diplomatic.³³ Leaders with these qualities tend to possess a charismatic demeanor and are generally extroverted in nature. Based on the Big Five personality model, extroversion and agreeableness are two of the five personality traits that link personal characteristics with job performance.³⁴ It is extremely difficult to be an effective leader without some level of social skill and tact. Air Force leaders are not required to be socialites, but leadership is about people and some social skill is a prerequisite for the job.

Integrity is the glue that binds many of the leadership characteristics together. Integrity is more than just acting fair; it is the quality of honesty and trustworthiness.³⁵ In the Air Force, integrity is part of the core values of the organization and held in high esteem through all military entities. Because integrity is about personal principles, it is the quality that makes the leader worthy of trust.³⁶ With a recent trend of ethical breaches from strategic leaders, highlighting the tenants of integrity should be at the forefront of our academic efforts.

Strengths

The strength of the trait theory lies in its simplicity. Based on years of research, certain characteristics of effective leaders continue to come up again and again. While no list is complete, there exist key qualities that make great leaders extraordinary men and women. The idea is that all people are not created equal. Some possess qualities that make them natural leaders. Much like a basketball player needs to be tall and a football player needs to be large and strong; a leader needs to possess certain characteristics as well. While there are small football players and short professional basketball players, the odds are not in favor of this quality becoming the norm. So it goes with great leaders as well. Chances of successful leadership are greatly increased when the prospective leader is intelligent, self-confident, determined, and socially acute.

Weaknesses

The trait theory has been criticized for its limited utility in leader development.³⁷ Many of the identified traits of successful leaders are challenging to teach. While used as an integral component in selection criteria, development of individual traits remains an elusive concept for leadership practitioners.

Another criticism of the trait theory lies in its inattention to the leadership situation. Members who possess certain traits that make them great leaders in one circumstance fail to consistently produce results in another. It is commonly accepted that the situation influences the required leadership.³⁸ Additionally, there is not one consistent set of qualities that make great leaders in all circumstances. Because of the identified variations in the theory, the trait theory is considered incomplete when defining various aspects of effective leadership.

Situational Leadership

The trait theory is considered incomplete when defining effective leadership because it fails to consider the situation. The idea of situational leadership fills much of the void left by the trait theory. Situational leadership is a study of the relationship of the leader, the follower, and the situation. The theory suggests that leaders must change their leadership style as the situation changes. "Situational Leadership[™], developed in the late 1960s by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, provides a practical model for leaders to use in diagnosing the needs of the employees and then applying an appropriate leadership style."³⁹

Recognizing there is no best leadership style, as leadership is situation dependant; managers need to be taught to be situational leaders.⁴⁰ It is the variance in leadership style as it relates to follower development that is most appealing. Leaders are continually torn between the mission and the people. While this dichotomy is not uncommon among military leaders, the situational leadership model provides a leadership roadmap to balance these forces in a rational and educated way.⁴¹

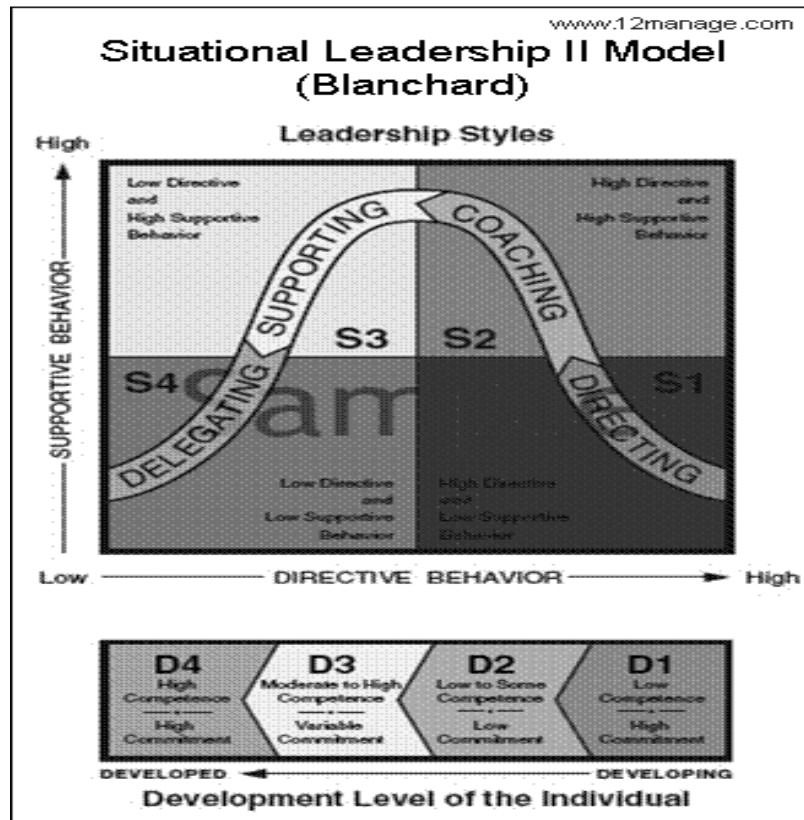


Figure 1. Situational Leadership Model⁴²

More than just a simple leadership grid between task and relationship, the situational model incorporates follower development into the thought process. There is a match of leader behavior based on four different follower development levels D1-D4. With corresponding follower development in the mix, a leader can choose the appropriate leader behavior as a recipe for success.

As stated above, follower development levels are rated on a scale of D1 to D4. A follower in the D1 category has little or no performance related experience. Because of this reality, a more directive/telling (S1) leadership style is in order. As the follower progresses in skill to the D2 level, the member possesses some limited task oriented skill and confidence begins to build. This is where a more selling/coaching (S2) leadership perspective is in order. When the follower progresses to the D3 level, task

competence is high but confidence can wane at times. Because of this follower reality, the leader must adapt by presenting a more participating/supporting (S3) approach. Lastly, when the follower has progressed to D4, the member is fully confident and competent in the task at hand. All self-doubt has been eliminated and the leader must be more willing to delegate (S4). As leadership style is altered to accommodate follower development levels, overall efficiency of task accomplishment is the desired result. As a leader, the follower development level must be constantly monitored to produce effective results. The leader must be able to properly assess the follower's capability and willingness to perform a selected task. The leader must know the people.

Strengths

One of the key strengths of situational leadership is that the theory has been well tested in the marketplace. This leadership theory has been taught in the training programs of more than 400 of the Fortune 500 companies.⁴³ It is a well established and credible model for leadership success.

Other strengths of the situational leadership model include its flexibility, practicality, and prescriptive value.⁴⁴ As leaders learn to alter their leadership approach based on the needs of the followers and the overall development level, a successful outcome is the common result. As this result is repeated time and time again, there is increased confidence that the theory works. Repeatability has been the key to the overall success of this leadership theory.

Weaknesses

There exists criticism of the situational leadership model. Any theory that has such wide spread exposure will certainly develop disapproval at some level. A main criticism of the model stems from the group versus individual nature of the model.⁴⁵ It

becomes obvious there are challenges with this model based on focus. When leading a group of people, should the leader develop a leadership style that suits the amalgam of the entire group; or should the leader continually change style according to the model based on one-on-one leader/follower interaction? If the leader chooses a style that matches the group dynamic, there will certainly be individuals within the group that are quite different from the norm. The theory fails to address this reality.

Leadership Theory Taught in Air Force Curriculum

As leadership theory sets a foundation of formal leadership training and understanding, an assessment of Air Force distance learning curriculums will provide insight into theories of leadership that are most predominate in the lesson plans. The research conducted is a review of the science-based parts of the leadership curriculum, not a study of leadership as a form of art. An overall assessment of the appropriateness of this type of training will be concluded from the data collected.

Squadron Officer School

Squadron Officer School (SOS) is the first school in a series of three distant learning opportunities for officer development. This course is taught to captains and provides a formative basis for future officer growth. While this curriculum is the most accommodating for resident opportunities due to length of course and ease of selection, many of the reserve officers are still unable to take advantage of this prospect. Because of this reality, distant learning for SOS is often the only available option for an officer core comprised of citizen soldiers.

Because this course is introductory in nature, the leadership curriculum comprises a diverse list of reading that encompasses many of the leadership themes included in future educational opportunities. The curriculum consists of Air Force

instructions, pamphlets, and directives that cover topics ranging from development and risk management to mentoring and problem solving. Decision making, self awareness, and team building are consistent themes throughout and are appropriate for this phase of officer development. There exists a couple of reading selections that speak to strategic subjects, but most relate to what the Air Force is doing now and how the daily mission is being accomplished. In general, I find the leadership portion of the SOS curriculum to be appropriate for this stage of officer development. While the rigor is average, the diversity of subject provides a credible leadership foundation from which to build.

Recommendation

Additional emphasis on leadership theory is required for this phase of officer development. Of the forty reading selections of the SOS distant learning leadership curriculum, only two touch on any form of leadership theory. The Dynamic Followership article is an excellent selection for young officers and should remain as part of the curriculum.⁴⁶ This article speaks to leadership theory based on the tenants of followership and followership competencies, an appropriate reading to introduce the reality of leadership and followership occurring simultaneously in the military ranks. All military officers have subordinates and superiors from the moment of inception. Even our most senior military officers are subordinate to a civilian boss, making the tenants of followership a critical lesson for young and old alike. The second reading includes lessons of leadership theory that emphasize aspects of transactional and transformational leadership introduced by Bass⁴⁷ This is an excellent article as well and the ideas presented in the article should be expanded upon with additional training on the subject.

I realize a new distant learning curriculum is in the final stages of implementation, but no information was available for the study of the updated program. The new version will provide an opportunity for additional instruction in leadership theory. Regardless of curriculum update timing, SOS provides an excellent opportunity to introduce a multitude of leadership theories to enable young officers to begin the search for the true essence of leadership and discover avenues of personal applicability. This introduction to leadership theory should be broad-based instruction on many of the prominent leadership theories including trait, situational/behavioral, leader-member exchange, servant, and transformational. This instruction will serve as the basis of knowledge for future application.

Air Command and Staff College

Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) is the intermediate level school targeted toward officers at the rank of Major. The resident course is ten months in length with selection rates typically hovering around 20% for active duty officers. Due to the competitive selection process and the lengthy course curriculum, reserve officers are rarely able to attend this course in resident status, leaving the distant learning program as the only option for officer development.

The ACSC distance learning program consists of 8 self paced courses and 4 applied courses and has recently transitioned to all on-line curriculum content. The course provides intermediate developmental education (IDE) and phase one joint professional military education (JPME) credit. Additionally, the ACSC program has been expanded to include the option of a Masters Degree completed in conjunction with the regular ACSC syllabus. This provides officers the unique opportunity to expand on officer development while getting a Masters in Military Operational Art and Science

accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. While some additional time and effort are required to take advantage of this opportunity, much of the curriculum has been tailored to combine the lessons of ACSC with the Master's program. Additionally, this opportunity is being developed for mid level captains who enroll in an expanded program. This is an outstanding program that meets the needs of the reserve officer corps.

The leadership portion of the ACSC distant learning program is a comprehensive syllabus divided into 7 lessons comprising 71 total reading selections. The readings span subject areas including followership, leadership, critical thinking, resilience, mentoring, and ethics. Additionally, this course includes lessons for potential squadron commanders with subject matter specifically tailored for command challenges. There are numerous lessons directed to the study of leadership theory. Trait, situational, transformational, and authentic leadership theories are covered in detail. Theories on followership and followership styles are covered, as well as lessons on command vision, systems thinking, and models for leading organizational change.

Recommendation

I do not recommend any change to the content of the ACSC syllabus and I applaud the versatility of the on-line format. Of the three distant learning opportunities studied, this course has the most comprehensive approach to leadership training available to Air Force officers. The all-inclusive lesson plan contains direct reference to both the art and science of leadership training with content that directly applies to the challenges found in today's leadership environment. The development of a core curriculum for all students based on the ACSC model has improved the educational opportunities throughout all levels of formal military education.

Air War College

Air War College (AWC) is the senior level course targeted for lieutenant colonels. The resident course is comparable to ACSC in length and has a competitive application process with selection rates lower than to those found at the intermediate level. Analogous to the reality of resident ACSC, the resident AWC course is rarely appropriate for members of the Air Force Reserve. Most reserve officers will attend AWC through the distant learning program.

The distant learning program meets the criteria for senior developmental education (SDE) and JPME Phase II. The leadership curriculum of the distant learning program consists of 13 lessons with 48 total reading selections. These readings concentrate on senior level leadership challenges including aspects of military culture, mentoring, leading change, fiscal realities, resilience, and Air Force accountability. The selected reading list concentrates on the science of leadership training by addressing aspects of decision making, culture, climate, change, and reflection/self-awareness. Additionally, leadership as an art is taught through examples of leadership by general officers such as Petraeus. Overall the rigor is average, but the curriculum covers a wide span of strategic subjects necessary for senior leader development.

Recommendation

I recommend an abridged review of leadership theory to provide a framework for senior leader training. Although the distant learning leadership curriculum covers a wide range of leadership instruction, there is no review of prominent leadership theories or their applicability at the senior officer level. While leadership theory was taught extensively in ACSC, an additional reading selection dedicated to the review of leadership theory would provide the distant learning student the opportunity to once

again dwell on leadership at its very essence. I am advocating for one additional reading similar to the selection in ACSC titled A Review of Leadership Theory and Competency Frameworks by Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, and Dennison.⁴⁸ The additional reading selection should provide a broad overview of leadership theory both past and present as a mechanism to provide insight into the qualities of successful leaders.

After reviewing SOS, ACSC, and AWC distant learning opportunities, there are numerous references to trait theory, but only a few direct references to situational leadership. Even when trait theory is not specifically cited, there are many references to the characteristics of leadership and leaders throughout all curriculums. Explicit understanding of the traits that provide the foundation for effective leadership are necessary for the military professional and therefore a critical component of formal military education. From the research conducted, students are exposed to many of the aspects of the trait theory. However, these positive traits and characteristics are emphasized without a contrarian view presented. The study of toxic leadership presents a view of what not to do as a leader, but is not mentioned in any of the curriculums. If a leader should be intelligent, self confident, motivated, and sociable, then he/she should not be incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular, or evil.⁴⁹ The tenants of toxic leadership should be presented as examples of failed leadership characteristics and provide negative reinforcement for those specific traits.

Situational leadership is referenced in the ACSC curriculum, but transformational and authentic leadership get more emphasis. Although situational leadership is one of the more widely recognized theories and possesses prescriptive leader behavior,

transformational and authentic leadership theories are more recently studied. While this could be a case of out with the old and in with the new, it is hard to ignore the fact that situational leadership has endured the test of time in the civilian marketplace and has been included in numerous training programs.⁵⁰ A stronger emphasis is recommended.

Due to the limited scope of this paper, several important theories of leadership were excluded from discussion and review. Specifically, leader-member exchange, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, Fiedler's contingency model, and servant leadership are worthy of study. These theories should be introduced to Air Force officers through formal military education and studied to broaden perspective and inform a personal leadership style. A more concentrated study of leadership theory is appropriate for all phases of officer development.

Conclusion

Teaching the aspects of successful leadership remains an elusive target for the education community. While leadership training varies widely from institution to institution, similarities exist that provide a common basis of instruction. Curriculums are developed to teach facets of leadership that comprise both art and science. The ideals of leadership are delineated from the aspects of management through definitional roles and responsibilities. Managers plan, budget, staff, and control; leaders establish direction, align, and motivate.⁵¹ The most effective occupiers of senior leadership positions do both efficiently. While some aspects are innate to individual leaders, most educators believe that leadership is a skill that can be taught, honed, and developed over time.

The distant learning curriculum of SOS, ACSC, and AWC each have robust leadership programs dedicated to teaching the tenants of leadership to officers at the

respective ranks of Captain, Major, and Lieutenant Colonel. These leadership lessons include aspects of leadership theory taught as a foundational mechanism for leader development. Military leadership is taught as both an art and science. Leadership taught as a science is grounded in leadership theory and should be included in each curriculum. While ACSC has a robust study of theories of leadership, SOS and AWC are weak in these foundational aspects. Of the theories of leadership taught, trait, situational, transformational, and authentic are the most common. Theories of leadership remain a prominent fixture in the core curriculum of educational institutions throughout the country. The future of the Air Force profession demands that they remain an integral part of our military distant learning programs.

Endnotes

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² Bernard M. Bass, "The Meaning of Leadership," in *The Leader's Companion*, ed. J. Thomas Wren, (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 37-38.

³ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 2.

⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵ Richard L. Hughes, Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon J. Curphy, "What is Leadership?" in *The Leader's Companion*, ed. J. Thomas Wren (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 39-43.

⁶ Bass, "The Meaning of Leadership," 37-38.

⁷ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 3.

⁸ Shelley A. Kirkpatrick and Edwin A. Locke, "Leadership: Do Traits Matter?" in *The Leader's Companion*, ed. J. Thomas Wren (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 133-143.

⁹ Ralph M. Stogdill, "Personal Factors Associated with Leadership" in *The Leader's Companion*, ed. J. Thomas Wren (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 127-132.

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¹¹ Richard L. Hughes, Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon R. Curphy, "What is Leadership?" in *The Leader's Companion*, ed. J. Thomas Wren (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 39-43.

¹² John Lawler, "The Essence of Leadership?" *Existentialism and Leadership*, no. 1 (2005): 215-230.

¹³ John P. Kotter, "What Leaders Really Do," in *The Leader's Companion*, ed. J. Thomas Wren (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 114-123.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: The Eight Steps to Transformation," in *The Leader's Change Handbook: An Essential Guide to Setting Direction and Taking Action*, eds. Jay A. Conger, Gretchen M. Spreitzer, and Edward E. Lawler III, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 87-99.

¹⁸ Kotter, "What Leaders Really Do," 114-123.

¹⁹ Kotter, "Leading Change: The Eight Steps to Transformation," 87-99.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 2.

²⁵ Ibid., 4-5.

²⁶ Kirkpatrick and Locke, "Leadership: Do Traits Matter?" 133-143.

²⁷ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 15.

²⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁹ Kirkpatrick and Locke, "Leadership: Do Traits Matter?" 133-143.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 20.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Stephen P. Robbins and Timothy A. Judge. *Organizational behavior*, 14th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc, 2011).

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³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 24.

³⁸ Ibid., 23.

³⁹ Jane W. Gibson, Charles W. Blackwell, Peter Dominicis, and Nicole Demerath, "Telecommuting in the 21st Century: Benefits, Issues, and a Leadership Model Which Will Work," *Journal of Leadership Studies*, no. 8 (Spring 2002), 75-87.

⁴⁰ Kenneth H Blanchard, Susan Fowler, and Lawrence Hawkins, *Self-Leadership and the One Minute Manager: Increasing Effectiveness through Situational Self Leadership* (Pymble, NY: HarperCollins, 2005), xiv.

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⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 92.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 93.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁶ Sharon Latour and Vicki Rast, "Dynamic Followership: The Prerequisite for Effective Leadership," *Air and Space Power Journal*, (Winter 2004): 102-110.

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⁵⁰ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 92.

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